

DHS Move On MANPAD Defense Not Enough For Some Democrats

Democrats who have been pushing the Bush Administration to act quickly to arm commercial aircraft against possible shoulder-fired missile attacks said last week that Dept. of Homeland Security (DHS) is moving too slowly and underestimates the threat of a man-portable air defense system (MANPAD) attack.

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.), who with Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) penned S.311 requiring fitting jetliners with MANPAD defenses, said shoulder-fired missiles "are probably the greatest danger commercial airliners face in today's world. While I'm glad DHS is finally moving forward, it's at much too slow a pace. We can't afford to wait another two years to outfit planes. It's already been 14 months" since terrorists tried to take down a chartered Israeli aircraft with a shoulder-fired missile in Kenya in November 2002. DHS expects to have its study of MANPAD systems completed by 2006.

Congress estimates it would cost airlines about \$1 million to install the systems, and some lawmakers want the federal government to pay to equip the current fleet. Airlines would be required to pay for the equipment on new aircraft orders.

"We know the threat posed by shoulder-fired missiles is real," said Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.), who sponsored a Boxer/Schumer companion bill, H.R. 580, in the House. "They have brought down scores of helicopters and planes over the last 30 years. We also know that technology already exists, is currently operational on military aircraft and can defend our commercial fleet. The threat is simply too severe to allow bureaucrats to set their own timetables to make use of those protections."

DHS said Tuesday it chose three vendors — Northrop Grumman, BAE Systems and United Airlines — to start adapting military missile defenses for the commercial sector. Israel said DHS would spend \$120 million during two years, but with no commitment to install the equipment commercially. Boxer has urged a speedier timetable and wants aircraft used in the Civil Reserve Air Fleet (CRAF) outfitted quickly.

Boxer and Israel in August wrote an amendment to expedite installing countermeasures on 300 CRAF aircraft. Israel's bill remains stalled in committee, he said, though Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.), chair of the House Transportation aviation subcommittee, has said he supports installing the systems. -DM

FAA Gives Nod To Ground Communications Modernization

FAA is starting to deploy a modernized ground communications system to its largest facilities nationwide, after successful tests of the upgraded system in

the Kansas City and Dallas-Fort Worth en route centers.

Harris Corp., which won the FAA Telecommunications Infrastructure (FTI) program in July 2002, is handling the work under a 15-year contract capped at \$3.5 billion. FAA figures it will pay about \$2 billion.

The contract covers ground communications among about 5,000 ground locations, including all FAA facilities and unmanned posts, such as radio and radar sites. The agency decided in 1999 that its communications system could be much more efficient and cheaper if the "multiplicity of network and sub-networks" were integrated under a single contract, said FAA Telecommunications Manager Steve Dash.

Officials declared the new system operationally ready for deployment on Dec. 23 — about a month ahead of schedule. The first deployment phase, running to September, covers the 27 major facilities that are the backbone of FAA operations, Dash said. These will include en route air traffic control centers, and the agency's technical and command centers.

The second phase, beginning in July, covers all remaining facilities, including ATC towers and terminal radar approach controls. The entire deployment will run through 2007, Dash said. Harris will manage the entire network from an operations center in Melbourne, Fla.

Dash said FTI should cut FAA's telecommunications costs by about 13% during the life of the contract, saving more than \$700 million. Also on the Harris team are Raytheon, Sprint and several regional telecommunications carriers. -AS

Qantas plans to lease three new Airbus A320s from Singapore Aircraft Leasing Enterprise (SALE) for use in the carrier's new low-cost airline, Jetstar. Planned configuration for the A320s — powered by International Aero Engines (IAE) V2500s — is 177 seats in a single-class layout. Jetstar is set to take delivery of the planes in June and July. Boeing 717s operated by Impulse Airlines are slated to be the backbone of Jetstar's fleet when the carrier launches operations in May (DAILY, Dec. 23, 2003); it plans to phase out the A320s over 18 months.

Boeing logged its first order of the year Jan. 4 from Canadian low-fare carrier WestJet, which bought seven 737-700s. The airline's board approved the purchase in the fourth quarter of 2003 (DAILY, Nov. 11, 2003). Deliveries are set to begin in 2005. WestJet started flying -700s in 2001, and 26 of the carrier's 44 737s are -700s.

Grupo TACA maintained an average 92.05% on-time performance for arrivals in the third quarter of 2003, based on U.S. Dept. of Transportation standards.